Aristasia Treasure Trove

A Legend of Ithelia (fragment) Monday, Mar 31 2008

Aristasian Literature and Symbolism for Aristasiansaristasia6:41 pm

Readers may be interested in a fragment of Old Aristasian literature that has recently come to light. It appears to be from a blank-verse drama concerning the Novacairen Princess Ithelia. Whether it is a translation of an older text or was originally written in Westrenne is not known, and, frustratingly, the subject of the conversation does not come to light.

Ithelia was a famous queen of Novacaire. This story is clearly set in her youth, when her mother, Ehrejene was still on the throne. While the story remains unclear, the piece provides us with a pleasing example of this style of rhetorical verse and gives a strong flavour of the ancient Aristasian East particularly in its powerful assimilation of the royal maidens to the sun and moon, which, we must understand, would have been for the writer far more than a mere literary simile.

The only points of elucidation that are really necessary is that “Rayin” (pronounced as one syllable) is the old term for “Queen”, and a Rani is a schoolmistress.

Ehrejene: Welcome thee Daughter, and enter thee close to our presence,
Speak freely the words that thy heart has engaged thee to say.

Itheleia: What is to say, shining Sun, that is not said already?
Or what words of mine can recolour the hue of thy heart?

Ehrejene: Speak you again, good my child, of these wearisome matters?
Wherefore come you nigh the great throne but to trouble me thus?
Are they not settled and done, O most radiant Daughter?
And wherefore should the Child seek to colour the heart of the Rayin?
Should not the heart of the Rayin be steadfast and unchanging?
Should it not weather the storm-winds, withstand the high flood?
Alter not in its bearing by even the breadth of a finger?
Alter not though a Child may weep tears that shall call forth her own?

Itheleia: All you say is most true, O most royal and radiant Mother.
For the words of the Rayin are like Scripture writ down in a book,
And whoso shall alter the book hath forsaken the pathway,
The pathway that leadeth the soul into radiant light.

Ehrejene: What is there more to be said, O most wise among childer?
All I should teach thee is by thee already beknown.
Go then thy ways and let peace ever cradle thy spirit,
Thy turbulent spirit that troubles herself without cause.
Go then thy ways, or yet better, remain with thy mother,
With thy Mother that loveth thee near; and disturb not the Rayin.

Itheleia: To my Mother most lief will I fly, like a bird at the even;
Like a bird that is young and whose small wings do tire from long flight;
Like a bird that hath held herself up on the wind's mighty stairway,
Hath held herself up by a strength she doth scarcely possess.
To my Mother most lief will I come when my long flight is ended,
And that it were ended betimes doth my heart most desire,
Yet desireth in vain, for still must I bear myself upward,
Ever up must I climb to the radiant feet of the Rayin.

Ehrejene: O, Ithelie, my Child-

Itheleia: no, I pray thee, break not my flight's rhythm,
For it cometh not easy, this scaling the wind's subtle thread;
Neither call me thy Child, for I speak to thee not as a Daughter:
I speak to thee now as a Princess may speak to the Rayin.
O, most far-raying Sun, 'tis the Moon that has enter'd thy presence,
Who would tell thee of what she hath seen by her own lesser light.
For the words of the Rayin are like Scripture inscrib'd on a tablet,
And whoso shall change the least jot of them, surely she sins,
All these things know I well, and it needeth no Rani to teach me
For the Scripture is sure and eternal-but not so the Scribe.
The Scribe is a right goodly maid that is true to her calling,
Yet her finger may slip: and the light, may it not fail her eye?
And the Rayin, at the last, is a Scribe; and the words she declaimeth,
Are they not copied from those that are written on high?

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Poems from Miss Mayhew Friday, Aug 3 2007

Aristasian Literature and Aristasiansaristasia11:36 pm

Miss Victoria Mayhew confided:

The discussion of Novarian games and Japanese culture reminded me that I had written some Japanese-styled poems to a brunette, long ago; Cassandra was her name. Alas, we were not meant to be! She married another. However, while we were in each other's company, we wrote each other many poems.

I tried my hand at writing both tanka and haiku. Tanka is actually a much older style than haiku. Haiku is from the age of the samurai; tanka comes from the heyday of Heian-kyo, a time when the romantic love of women was exalted.

I hesitate to share these – I have longed to share my literary efforts here for some time. I am afraid that my work might be somewhat too "riskay" – it is no more explicit than the poetry of Sappho, but as I am sure I have mentioned before, I was raised in a very modest household. (Arcadia is in some ways more modest than Quirinelle!) Part of what made beauty and romantic love so beautiful and romantic, in my family, was the way they were whispered in a trembling voice rather than cried out to the heavens; some things were quite private, and that was that.

These poems were the fruit of my desperate longing. Cassandra is in my past now; she is happy with her wife, and she has published some of the poems that she wrote me, so perhaps it is safe for me to show some of the poems that I wrote her. Again, I hope they are not too flagrant.

I tried to be true to the spirit of Heian culture first, and only secondarily to the strict syllable counts that true Japanese poetry demands. It was a difficult decision, but real tanka and haiku are meant to be spoken, and they sound best to the ear if they are spoken in Japanese. Trying to convey the proper mood in written English is difficult enough. So often when one tries to force English to bend to Japanese rhythms, the result is stilted and artificial and most un-Real.

About the second to last haiku. I don't think Nippon ever had any kestrels, but the kestrel was a bird that Cassandra identified with, so I allowed myself a conceit.

Linked Tanka

I.

Swift the dawn rises
stretching her arms to the sky
smiling at a dream;
but soon the day is obscured
by the clouds of your absence.

II.

Behind rice paper
we whisper our love, breathing
soft sighs; our deep looks
are hidden behind spread fans.
Ah! Can we not see open air?

III.

The plum blossoms weep,
without you to behold them;
in the lonely night,
the moon cries without comfort.
Alone, I too am weeping.

IV.

Your hands are white, and
soft as silk against my breasts;
white as lightning in night.
Soft the thunder as it breaks,
sweeter than sake the rain!

Haiku (mostly unlinked)

I.

From the first thunder of spring
bloom roses:
the night petals of longing

II.

A cat cries in want
of a lover; would that I felt
the sweet stroke of your hand!

III.

I tilt my head back
to slake my thirst with warm rain -
I am lightning-soft.

IV.

This storm will not bate,
it seems; I am blown away
in wind and thunder.

V.

The roses burn, a
flaming sacrifice to
the goddess of my want.

VI.

The rains have gone, and
you with them: memory lies
on the roses – dew.

VII.

Your honour lies in my hands,
where you have placed it.
Why is it so sharp?

VIII.

We met in battle;
what folly, to engage in war
without armour!

IX.

Beyond the cherry blossoms,
a stable tree's trunk:
ah! mad, fleeting spring!

X.

The cup brims over;
the sweet wine of love's promise -
my parched throat cries thirst!

XI.

The veil is lifted.
Now truly I see the face
of living beauty!

XII.

A kestrel flew away -
why can I not spread my wings
and follow the wind?

XIII.

Cold and desolate
blows the wind from my city
to your far abode.

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Aristasian hymn: She Hath Riven Thursday, Jun 7 2007

Aristasian Literature and Devotion and Religion in Aristasiaaristasia6:15 pm

This is an old Aristasian hymn, ultimately based on the Scriptural passage:
"She hath riven the earth from the Heaven, the Spirit my Mother, and the turbulent waters, hath She not cleft them apart?"

She hath riven the earth from the Heaven,
She hath parted the water from the land,
And the sun in the morning that riseth on high
Is sustained by the strength of Her hand.

All the birds of the air She hath fashioned,
All the beasts of the forest She hath made;
In the quaint* constitution of every flower
Is the craft of her working displayed.

She hath raised up the mountains for pillars
To sustain the bright heavens above;
She hath clothed the earth in a raiment of green
For a sign of Her bounteous love.

And ourselves that are fallen from Heaven
Through the folly of our most vicious** will;
She hath shaped a sweet place of abundance on earth
And doth feed us and bide with us still.

Without end is Her might and Her wisdom,
Without end is Her love's consuming flame;
All the earth gives Her praise and the heavens on high
And the thunder re-echoes Her name.

She hath riven the earth from the Heaven,
She hath parted the water from the land,
And the sun in the morning that riseth on high
Is sustained by the strength of Her hand.

Notes
When sung, "She hath riven…" is repeated between each of the other stanzas.
* Quaint: Skilful, knowledgeable: related to can, canny, cunning, know and ultimately (in Aristasia) to High Cairen quinya and (in Telluria) to Greek gnosis and Sanskrit jnana, a root-group meaning light and pure Intellect. The words queen and gynae- (as in gynaecology) are also related. This group denotes the close connexion between the feminine principle and pure solar Intellect, the faculty which prehends Truth (as opposed to mere earthbound reason which is the reflected lunar light and in Telluria is denoted by the group moon-mental-man).
** Vicious: "Prone to vice", not "cruelly violent".

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Epic Poem: Darken the Sun? Monday, Apr 23 2007

Aristasian Literaturearistasia10:10 am

Here is a passage from a traditional Aristasian epic poem, dating from the days of the Cairen Empire. It is, of course, a Westrenne translation (note that "deer" doesn't mean "deer" in the usual sense, but any animal, as with the German *Tier).*

Darken the Sun? O, my Lady, thy jesting words chill me,
For they may hold a truth far more dreadful and dark than you deem.
Three moons agone, with my maidens, I rode in the forest,
In the depth of the forest where maiden hath scarcely set foot;
And the beasts of the wood, as we rode scurried forth from our presence,
Scurried forth like to creatures that feared we should do them some hurt.
And our hearts did wax heavy to feel that these deer did not trust us,
And our will was to question them; learn what had taught them this fear-
Yet no creature would stay near our stead nor abide inquisition,
But each made away at the sound of our furthest approach;
And she that had young that did play in the dappling sunflood
Did call them unto her and hurry them swift from our sight.
Even as she, who on meeting a friend in the courtyard,
Doth offer her greeting, in reverence pressing her palms,
But to see her once-friend, like a sightless maid, gaze ever forward
And draw in her robe as the friend of her childhood comes nigh;
Even thus in the wood were our gentle hearts smitten within us
As our sweet lesser sisters of earth did eschew our approach.
Here was a problem, it seemed, that defied resolution,
For the problem itself forbade asking of those that might tell.
Then, as perplexity troubled our hearts to the deepest,
We came to a place where a beast stood athwart of our path.
Great was the beast, clad in gold, like a Rayin of the forest,
Gold was her hair that fell over her head, like a maid's,
Full mighty was she, and her voice was like that of the thunder
And wroth did she seem as she raisèd that voice to the sky.
Never before, as I wand'red abroad in the forest,
Never before hath the greatest deer off'red me hurt.
Now as I sate saddled high on my milken-white palfrey,
My mount took a fear, and I own, as a blonde, thus did I.
Yet neither did move, for in both of us flows a blood royal,
And Marenkhe, our dark-hair'd companion, did ride to the fore.

A note from your Editrix: To appreciate the scansion of this traditional Aristasian blank verse, you must understand that each line carries five stresses: so, in the first line quoted here, the first stress falls on the first syllable: "DARKen the SUN", but in the second line it falls on the third syllable: "For they MAY hold a TRUTH". Be aware of this stress-pattern and you will quickly pick up the music of the verse. Note also the alternation of blonde and brunette line-endings (in a blonde line-ending the final stress falls on the penultimate syllable, in a brunette line ending it falls on the last syllable).

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